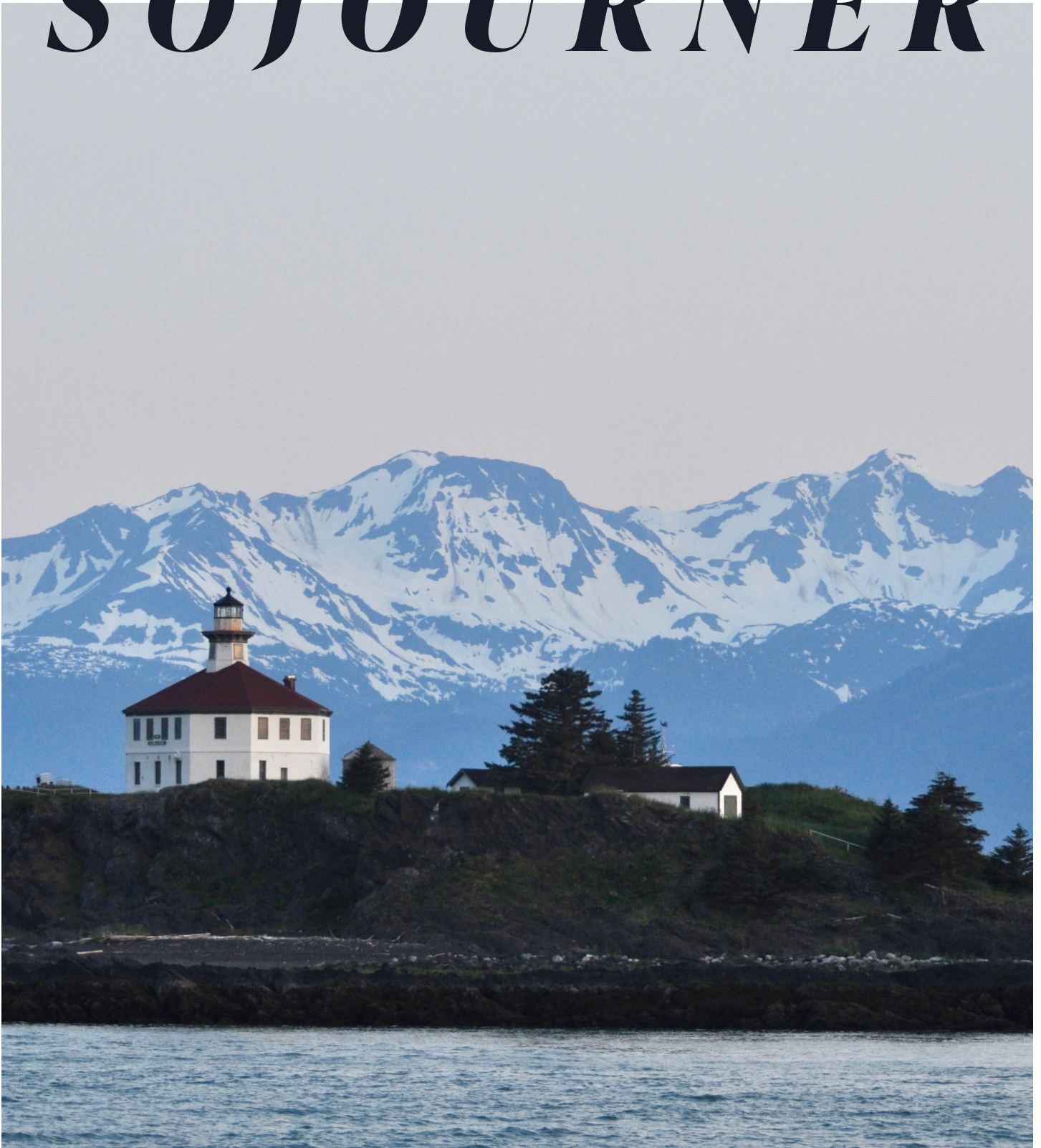


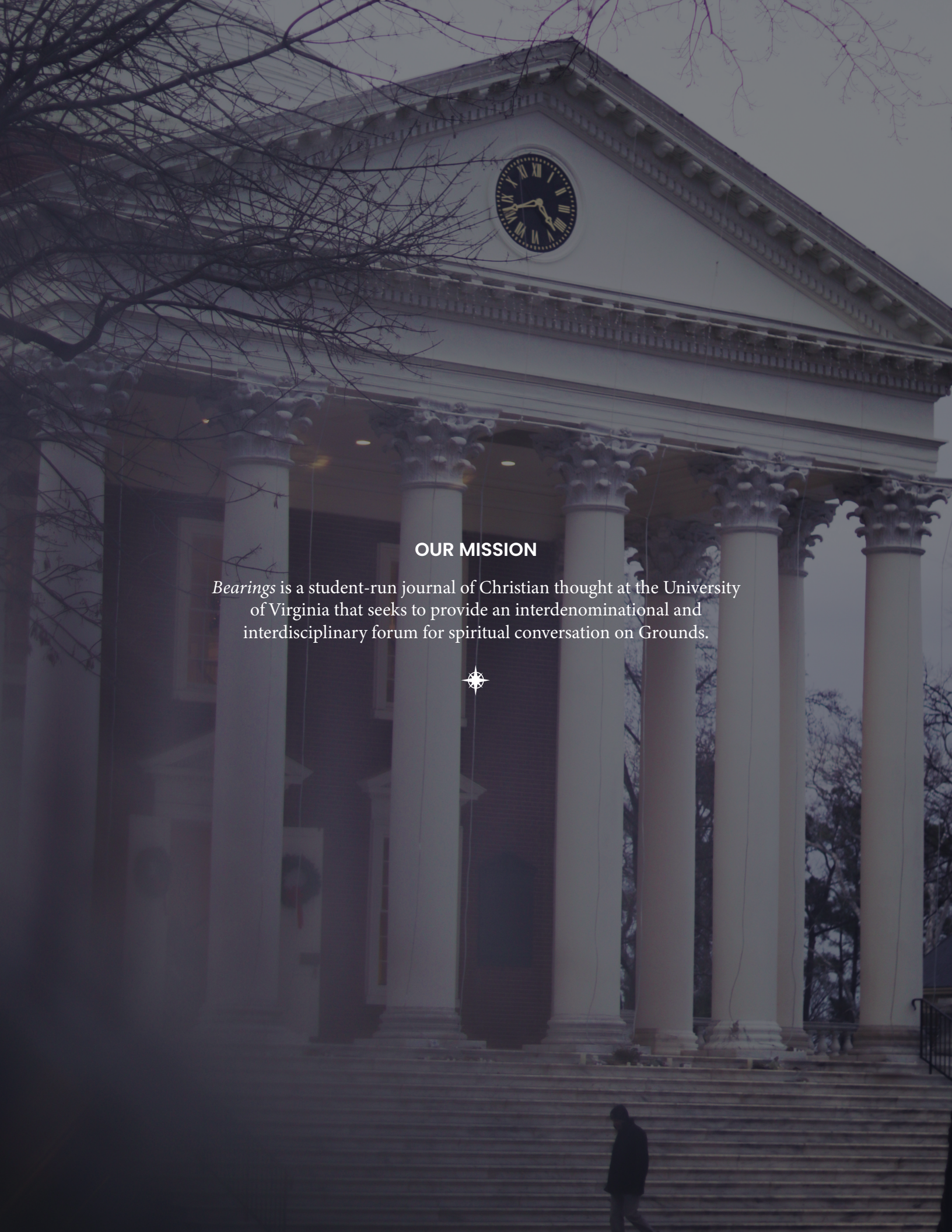
bearings

# *SOJOURNER*



ISSUE FIVE • SPRING 2023





## OUR MISSION

*Bearings* is a student-run journal of Christian thought at the University of Virginia that seeks to provide an interdenominational and interdisciplinary forum for spiritual conversation on Grounds.



# Dear Reader,

“Are we there yet?” You’re probably familiar with this classic question posed twenty minutes into a five-hour-long car ride from a small voice somewhere in the backseat. Or maybe you were that kid. The humor (or the exasperation) wound up in this query lies in the fact that the inquisitor very well knows that the destination has not yet been reached.

The anticipation, impatience, excitement, unsettledness – whatever you want to call it – emanating from that question is palpable. And I think perhaps we feel the longing within this childlike question even more the older we become. The further we walk along the journey of our own lives, the more we want to know not only when we will reach our destination, but what that destination will be. Where are we going, really?

The word sojourner captures just that: someone who journeys in a foreign land or stays temporarily in a place that isn’t their own home. Faithful believers from the Old Testament are described in Hebrews 11 as calling themselves sojourners on earth because “they [were] seeking a homeland.” They knew that their homeland wasn’t one that earth could provide; rather, it was “a heavenly one.” Even before the Messiah had come to reveal their eternal destination – before they could stop asking “are we there yet?” – they trusted that their stay on earth was only temporary.

This fifth installment of *Bearings* represents our attempt to reckon with that same sense of the temporary we feel here on earth as Christians. Within the pages of *Sojourner*, you’ll hear voices from different places along the journey. You’ll read poetry that explores the aching, grieving parts of identity, and prose that fights for unity amidst conflict, examines the nature of suffering, and questions the meaning of home.

We hope you’ll join us in exploring this collection of stories we’ve gathered on our own journeys. And as we follow in the footsteps of sojourners before us, let’s live a heavenward life knowing that we do have a beautiful destination waiting for us. The best is surely yet to come and no, we’re not there yet.

In Christ,

Annika Reynolds  
Editor-in-Chief



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*Come, my friends,  
‘Tis not too late to seek a newer world.*

*Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses”*





# To the Girl Who Needs Someone to Stay

KATIE MEAD

You need not wonder why they refuse you  
nor reason why your heart holds its frustrations;  
by bitterness did its blood flow,  
and alone it did beat to death.

You're broken, my dear,  
and have been for quite some time;  
yet still He also desired your flourishing here,  
so don't despise the expectation of a friend.

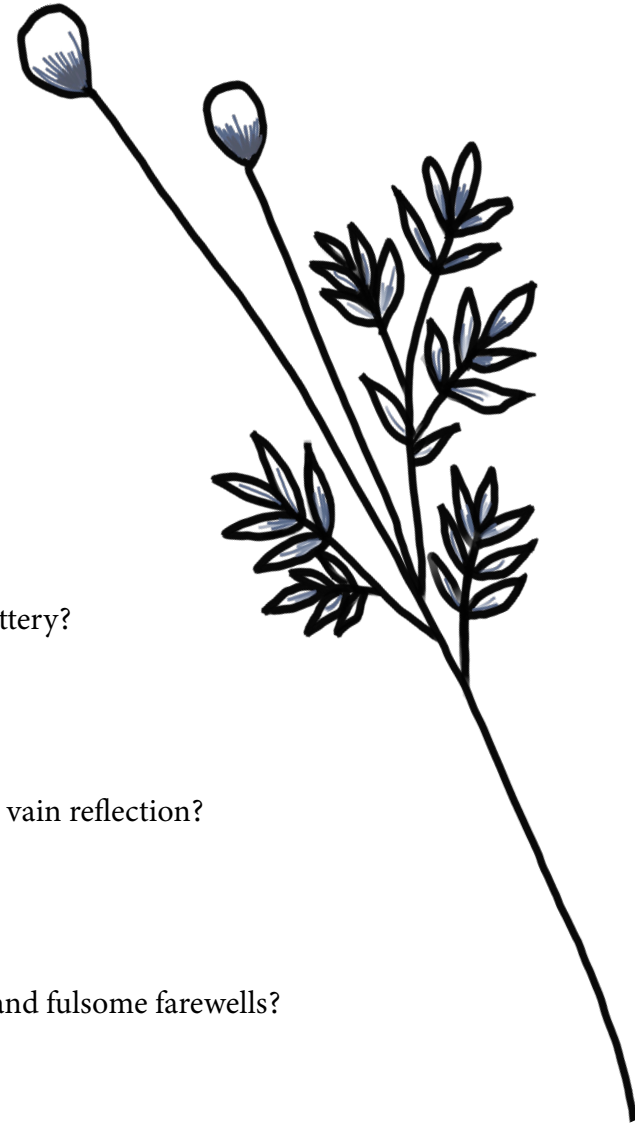
Only in perfect innocence  
did your longings reflect that glance returned,  
but the whites of their eyes told your blue  
that the colors would not mix  
and reminded you of your saddened dullness  
you somehow knew would come to be.

You questioned  
and screamed  
but all inside your head,  
for what ears wanted to hear anything but sweet flattery?

You bled  
and cried  
but all to blinded eyes,  
for what beauty wanted to see anything but its own vain reflection?

You spoke  
and invited  
but all to silenced mouths,  
for what words did they know but polite greetings and fulsome farewells?

You gave  
and asked  
but all to burdened hands,  
for what more to be acquired or let go by fists tightly clenched?



You starved  
and hid  
but all to ignorant minds,  
for what pain must be known of a stranger's uncommon life?

No ears  
No eyes  
No mouths  
No hands  
No minds

but His.

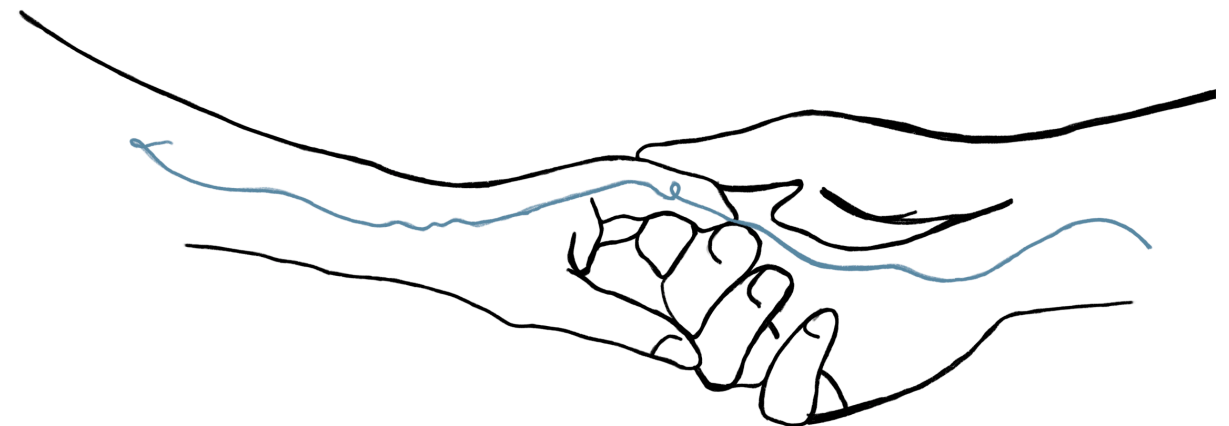
For He heard each desperate plea  
and experienced every tear captured in His bottle;  
He spoke truly words of loveliness, and held me safely in His wounded hands  
to feel evil's aching affliction,  
to take it as His own.

That beginning which hope knew well until isolation betrayed its enemy  
in loving obscurity and exclusion,  
it need not obtain the victory.

Mourn and lament, dear one,  
but take such careful notice  
not to remain stubbornly unsettled  
that you do not count joy in the grave of death.

Be assured of permanence  
in promise of the eternal day  
that by the work of God, we'll testify  
to abandonment that did not stay.

but He does.



# Knowledge from an Oak Tree

SAM KIPPS

When I was young, a towering oak tree stood in the front yard of my family’s home. From my perspective as a small boy, it was monstrously tall. Each strip of bark seemed like a scale on a gigantic beast’s body. This was my first impression of the tree, and let’s say that I only saw its trunk, its roots, and its bark—that I was so small and the tree so tall, I didn’t see the green foliage at the top of it. If it was spring, the leaves would’ve been green, but I missed them.

With my first impression of the tree, I can imagine that I went back inside that day, asked my parents what the huge, gray thing in the middle of the front yard was, and they told me “An oak tree.” Following that, I likely would’ve imagined every oak tree in existence as an enormous, gray, armor-plated thing. But that impression certainly couldn’t have lasted long. At some point, whether I grew or just finally looked up, I would’ve witnessed the thousands of glossy-green leaves attached by short, wiry stems, and the manifold branches that stretched out like a hundred oddly bent arms. Still being an oak tree, the image of what the tree was like would forever change with this new visual information. And because I had no clue that there are (or that there even could be), around five hundred different species of oak trees, my newly updated impression of what an oak tree is extended to all oak trees everywhere. But this was still a shallow, alarmingly incomplete understanding of what an oak tree is.

This example is used to demonstrate how we start our lives with a shallow and incomplete understanding of the world, others, and ourselves, and the process in

which we acquire knowledge through experience. We are given lives in which we are constantly learning. They are a continued series of revelations and a constant construction of frameworks of belief: belief about who God is (or isn’t); belief about what the world we live in is like, belief about who our family, friends, and coworkers are; and belief about who we, ourselves are. We are sojourners in our understanding of the world, of others, and of ourselves, and understanding this process of life helps us to navigate its difficult straits and to approach the journey with a spirit of humility and empathy.

After spring passed and temperatures rose, I noticed the leaves becoming a darker, more potent shade of green. That, and the fact that there seemed to be thousands more of them than in the spring. It was difficult to even see the branches that they were attached to. Then, slowly, summer faded and cooler weather ushered itself in. The leaves, having just been green, were now miraculously turning orange, gold, and red, and falling to the ground. Soon, I witnessed squirrels teeming at the base of the tree, snatching acorns and scampering off to different parts of the yard to bury them. And finally, when the days became brief and cold, and the nights long and evermore frigid, no more leaves hung from the branches. They all lay around the base of the tree: brown, withered remnants of their former glory.

*We are sojourners in our understanding of the world, of others, and of ourselves, and understanding this process of life helps us to navigate its difficult straits and to approach the journey with a spirit of humility and empathy.*

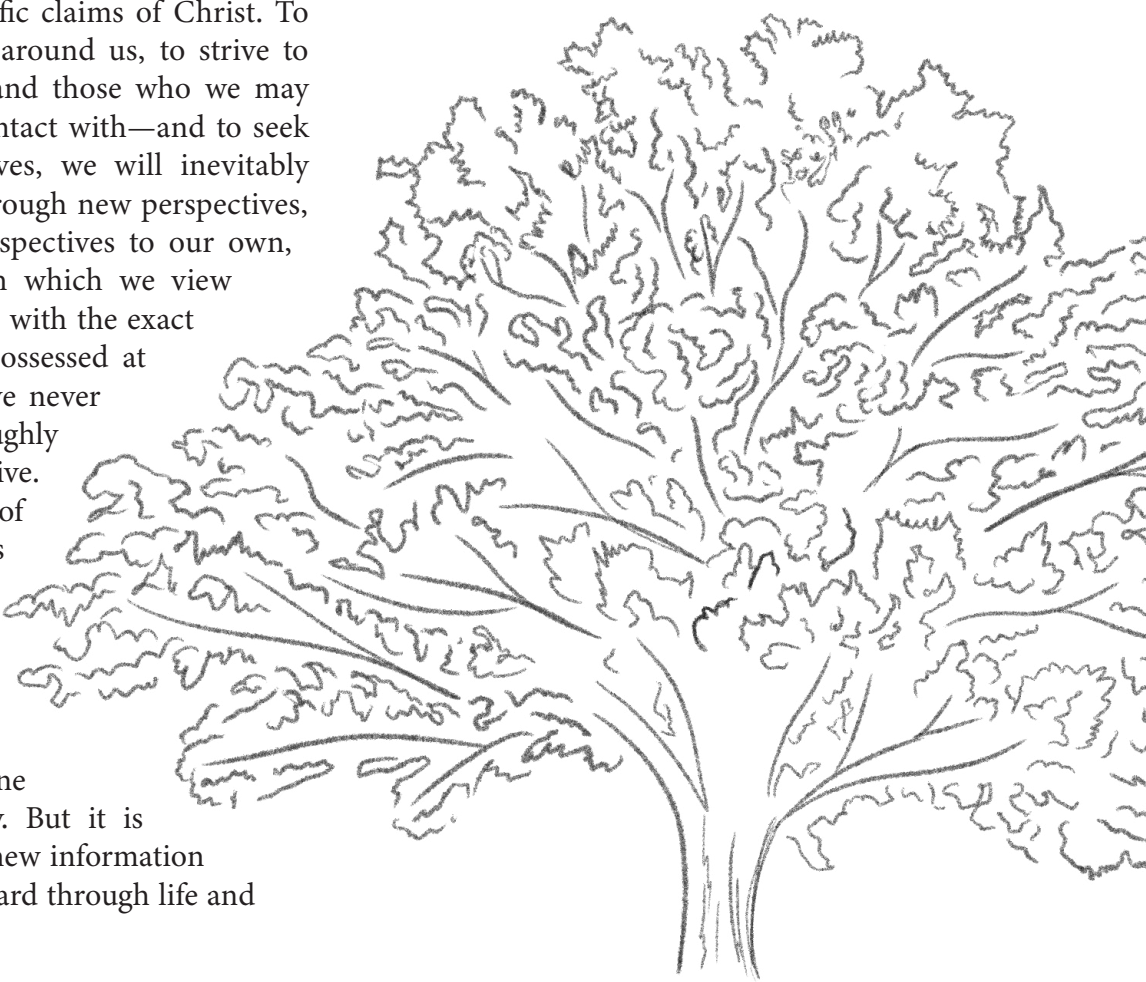
So had I witnessed the four seasons in which this kind of oak tree lives. Every single thing in our lives is likely similar to the encounters I had with the oak tree: as we experience something more than once, perhaps intentionally looking at it through a different lens or at a different part than before, we develop a more robust understanding of its intricacies—of how it is influenced

by its environment, how it influences its environment, and so on. It is expected that one grows in their beliefs and understanding of the world, others, and themselves as time progresses. Sometimes, however, that process of growth involves recognizing that we not only are not seeing the oak tree in its entirety, but that we don’t even know what an oak tree is. Furthermore, to learn of their existence might contradict our belief of the world as only containing pine trees, for example. And that—that might be a tough pill to swallow.

How does this example of an oak tree relate to the life of a college student? Well, attending a public university means having our framework of life challenged. It looks like a student raised in a Christian household reading Nietzsche in a philosophy class and defending the philosopher’s views in a mock debate; or an ardent supporter of the Democratic party collaborating on an econ project about what level of government involvement is best for the economy alongside a registered Republican; or perhaps, it’s a self-proclaimed atheist taking a New Testament class and learning about the specific claims of Christ. To fully engage with the world around us, to strive to understand those we love—and those who we may not love but still come in contact with—and to seek to better understand ourselves, we will inevitably encounter and must work through new perspectives, potentially contradictory perspectives to our own, and recraft the lens through which we view these things. To end one’s life with the exact same set of beliefs as they possessed at the beginning of it, is to have never taken the time to thoroughly understand another perspective. And maybe the acquisition of new information never brings about religious conversion or the switch to an entirely new career path. Maybe it only involves dismantling a bad habit in one’s life and replacing it with a better one or picking up a new hobby. But it is impossible not to encounter new information frequently as we wander forward through life and

to have this new information inform how we live from that moment on.

So what’s the benefit of understanding this process of acquiring knowledge and being changed by it? I believe it’s two-fold. Learning and changing because of what one has learned is not always an exhilarating, easy-going experience. Sometimes it can be intensely stressful and weigh heavily upon our conscience or mind, especially if with what we have learned we decide to adopt a new belief that might run counter to our family’s understanding of the world or might go against the commonality and bond that we share between our friends. Choosing to switch majors from pre-med to political science might not be met with such enthusiastic support if our parents have it set in their minds that we will become a doctor. Likewise, choosing to become a Christian in a family that vehemently mocks all forms of religion is a choice that garners tough consequences. Understanding how we acquire knowledge and how it changes us helps us to sit with the anxiety and pain that





might come when we receive backlash for a new belief we adopt or even lose relationships over. We are able to do this because of the understanding that the changing and revision of our beliefs is a consequence of healthy study, inquiry, and exploration. Secondly, understanding this process further establishes humility in learning. If we come into a situation understanding how little we know, we will be more able and willing to understand a belief system different than our own. The recognition that we do not share the same experiences and perspectives as many others should move us to attempt with greater effort to better understand their beliefs and opinions and why they believe what they believe. Doing so could cause us to change our beliefs—or it might not. In either circumstance, making the effort to see a situation through the eyes of another will give us greater empathy for them, and will help us in humility to strive for a better outcome for all—first as students, and then once out in the work world, through legislation, social and religious work, business, the arts, and other means of influence.

It’s an arduous process learning about the world we live in and those who live in it, including ourselves. Much can be lost in the process, and much can be gained. Either way, it’s important to know how it works and what to expect, so that we are able to meet the challenges that come with it with greater grace, ease, humility, and empathy.



**Peyton Stallings**  
*In Need of the Father*, 2023  
Pastel on paper



# How We Love

HUDSON BURKE

## INTRODUCTION

I would venture to say that anyone who has been around church, or Christian circles that sing contemporary worship music, has invariably heard the song “How He Loves.” What many do not know is the story behind the song. It was originally released on John Mark McMillan’s 2005 album, *The Song Inside the Sounds of Breaking Down*. It was written a few years earlier following the death of one of McMillan’s best friends, Stephen Coffey, who died in a car accident.<sup>1</sup> In the original track on this album, there’s a final verse that isn’t included in any covers, and John Mark McMillan doesn’t play it live. It reads:

“I thought about You  
The day Stephen died  
And you met me between my breaking  
I know that I still love you God  
Despite the agony  
See people they want to tell me you’re cruel  
But if Stephen could sing  
He’d say it’s not true  
Cause you’re good”<sup>2</sup>

In this version, you can hear this deeply personal cry to God sung through tears and pain. This was not written to be a congregational worship song. In McMillan’s words, “I sat down to have a dialogue with God and, really, He ended up having a dialogue with me. It’s like He was speaking to me through the song.”<sup>3</sup>

This psalmic conversation with God struck a chord with many and began to be covered by other artists like Kim Walker of Jesus Culture and David Crowder to be

sung for their churches. It is a broadly beloved song, but there is a divide over one line in the third verse. The more well-known version from David Crowder Band says “Heaven meets earth like an *unforeseen* kiss,” while John Mark McMillan sings “Heaven meets earth like a *sloppy wet* kiss.” When he began to cover the song, Crowder asked McMillan if he could change “sloppy wet” to “unforeseen” to make it more palatable to his audience, and McMillan agreed, unknowingly laying the battlefield for lyrical controversy.<sup>4</sup> If you google “sloppy wet kiss” or “unforeseen kiss,” you will be met with blog posts,<sup>5</sup> articles,<sup>6</sup> videos,<sup>7</sup> memes,<sup>8</sup> and even a research paper<sup>9</sup> about which one should be sung in church or follows the most correct doctrine. McMillan himself expressed his distaste over the debate on his blog several months after the release of David Crowder’s album, *Church Music*, which included the altered “How He Loves.”<sup>10</sup> In an interview, he expounds upon the culture that pushed the lyric change: “I think one of the problems is that there’s sort of a worship of correctness, where it’s like the correctness of the words supersedes the heart of the worshipper.”<sup>11</sup> McMillan points to the suppression of the authentic people of God in the authentic worship of God and reveals a larger issue in Christian community: in arguing over the words we use to describe how He loves, we fail to truly see the hearts of the people that we are called to love. My purpose is not to convince you that either version is more correct, more theologically orthodox, or more appropriate for worship than the other, nor is it to examine the reasons that caused the change to occur in the first place. Rather, I would

like to invite you to consider how you read, hear, or sing these words and open yourself to understanding them from the eyes, ears, and mouths of their authors.

## BIBLICAL BASIS

Focusing on two words out of a 192 word song perfectly exemplifies the human tendency to concentrate on the things that divide us rather than that which unites us. It’s not a new problem. The church has struggled with this from the beginning. Paul’s letter to the Galatians is primarily focused on addressing the conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The main point of contention was that ethnic Jews expected new, non-Jewish Gentile Christians to follow the laws of the Torah that previously set Israel apart as God’s chosen people. Especially problematic was the practice of circumcision, which was the sign of God’s covenant with the Jewish people that designated them as part of His chosen people.

*Focusing on two words out of a 192 word song perfectly exemplifies the human tendency to concentrate on the things that divide us rather than that which unites us.*

Paul preached that this was no longer necessary in light of the new covenant established by Christ’s death and resurrection, and that faith in Christ was the entry point into God’s covenant family, not the laws of the Torah. As Eugene Peterson rephrases Paul’s words from Galatians 5:6 in *The Message*, “For in Christ, neither our most conscientious religion nor disregard of religion amounts to anything. What matters is something far more interior: faith expressed in love.”<sup>12</sup> The early Christians were putting the law over love, the greatest commandment and call for all who follow Christ.

We may not be requiring people to circumcise their flesh, but we often expect them to circumcise their theology to fit with ours. We assume that they share our language, our views, and our experiences and push back when they don’t without first understanding

how they arrived at them. When we bicker over the “bad theology” of someone’s words, we belittle the experience from which those words spring and lose a fuller understanding of the person speaking them.

## MODERN APPLICATION

Since the release of “How He Loves” and its cover by David Crowder, John Mark McMillan has spoken about the “sloppy wet” description. As he writes in a blog post, “The idea behind the lyric is that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth converge in a way that is both beautiful and awkwardly messy.”<sup>13</sup> McMillan describes what he wanted to praise about God and His love in a short video, “It’s not a hollywood-hot-pink love. It’s a love that is willing to love things that are messy...In my anger and resentment and in my frustration, He could still love me through that...It’s a celebration of a God...who would want to be a part of our lives through those things and despite who we are.”<sup>14</sup> The “sloppy wet kiss” that McMillan sings about is a beautiful picture of a love that not only braves but embraces the mess, and a God that is willing to meet us where we are, even in the midst of our hardest seasons. That’s not to say that “unforeseen” is any less profound or beautiful, but it certainly conveys a very different aspect of God and His love. As one commenter points out, “unforeseen” describes an unconditional love that in Greek would be called *agape*.<sup>15</sup> This interpretation points to the unexpected and undeserved grace extended to us by no merit of our own, but by the goodness and love of God. Both “sloppy wet” and “unforeseen” kisses celebrate entirely true and praiseworthy, yet distinct, pictures of God’s love.

“How He Loves” isn’t the only victim of Christian lyrical scrutiny. Another prominent, more recent example can be seen in “Reckless Love” by Cory Asbury. The issue comes with the choice to describe God’s love as “reckless,” or more specifically, the negative connotation that many attribute to the word. Cory Asbury talks about the inspiration for the song in an interview with *Relevant* magazine. He describes how becoming a father for the first time helped him more fully grasp “the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God.”<sup>16</sup> The love that Asbury felt for his son, a furious adoration and desire to protect that



could not be shaken or diminished, ultimately revealed to him the truth of God’s love for His children. These are but two small examples, but they are indicative of a larger truth: Our lives, our loves, and our theologies are enriched by experience. If we take the time to listen to the experiences of the people surrounding us, we don’t just gain a greater understanding of them, we might even gain a greater understanding of the God who made them.

CONCLUSION

Love requires us to be willing to understand others and their experiences rather than forcing them to conform to ours. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NIV)<sup>17</sup>.

If we have perfect theology, but do not have love, our theology is worthless. Jesus entered into the sloppy wet mess of human life and experienced it. He met people in their experience, welcoming their brokenness, their incomplete and imperfect theology, and loved them in unforeseen ways. *That* is How He Loves.

<sup>1</sup>Relevant. “The Heart of John Mark McMillan.” RELEVANT, December 17, 2018. <https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/heart-john-mark-mcmillan/>.  
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<sup>8a</sup>“Anti Sloppy Wet Kiss Memes’s (@Unforeseen.Kiss) Instagram Profile • 301 ...” Accessed November 13, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/unforeseen.kiss/>.  
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<sup>12</sup>Galatians 5:6, MSG.  
<sup>13</sup>McMillan, John Mark. “How He Loves,” johnmarkmcmillan.  
<sup>14</sup>Mcmillan, John Mark. “How He Loves : A Song Story.” Vimeo, September 1, 2022. <https://vimeo.com/10868953>.  
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<sup>16</sup>Relevant. “Cory Asbury Tells the Story behind ‘Reckless Love.” RELEVANT, June 8, 2018. <https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/cory-asbury-reckless-love-the-sunday-staple-sweeping-the-nation-exerts-honesty-and-power/>.  
<sup>17</sup>1 Corinthians 13:1-3, NIV.



PHOTOGRAPHY FROM JACOB LEE



# Psalm 139

MEREDITH HICKS

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!

you see when I stare in the mirror,

and despise its truth

you hear my thoughts from afar,

thoughts I try to deafen

you are acquainted with my ways

O Lord, you know it

Altogether

And how do you not look down in shame?  
the broken remnants of your good creation  
O, what were you thinking  
when you threw me together?

Here I am Lord!

I'm looking for you  
(Where shall I go from your Spirit?)

when they're singing to you and shouting your name,

(You are there!)

so why can't I look up?

when I'm sitting on the floor and all that's left inside me

drains through just a few salty tears,

(You are there!)

so why am I left empty?

when the sun begins to rise, I send a few cries to you

(You are there!)

one more mourning and I'm afraid I might lose hope

Here I am Lord!

and where are you?

I'm standing and looking

I just don't like

what's looking back at me

this twisted and malformed thing

*For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works*

I'm trying to see you  
(Or where shall I flee from your presence?)

*fearfully and wonderfully made*

but where are you when I want to tear it apart

fragmenting pieces

but how dare you write these days for me, O God?

What were you thinking, O God!  
I'd hate to see the grain of sand  
that conjured me  
O, wake me up Lord!

O Lord, is it true?  
these thoughts don't scare you?

And how do you not look down in shame?  
the broken remnants of your good creation  
O, what were you thinking  
when you threw me together?  
(you knitted me together)

O, where are you!

*My frame was not hidden from you*

*intricately woven*

*your eyes saw my unformed substance*

O Lord!  
And how do you not look down in shame?

*In your book were written, every one of them*

I want to look up.  
I want to be full.  
I want to have faith.

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.  
I awake, and I am still with you.*

I want to see me through your eyes.  
(O men of blood depart from me!)

I'm trying to see you  
but from my reflection,  
I'm running  
I'm fleeing

but it's you.

when my darkness challenges the night  
(You are there!)

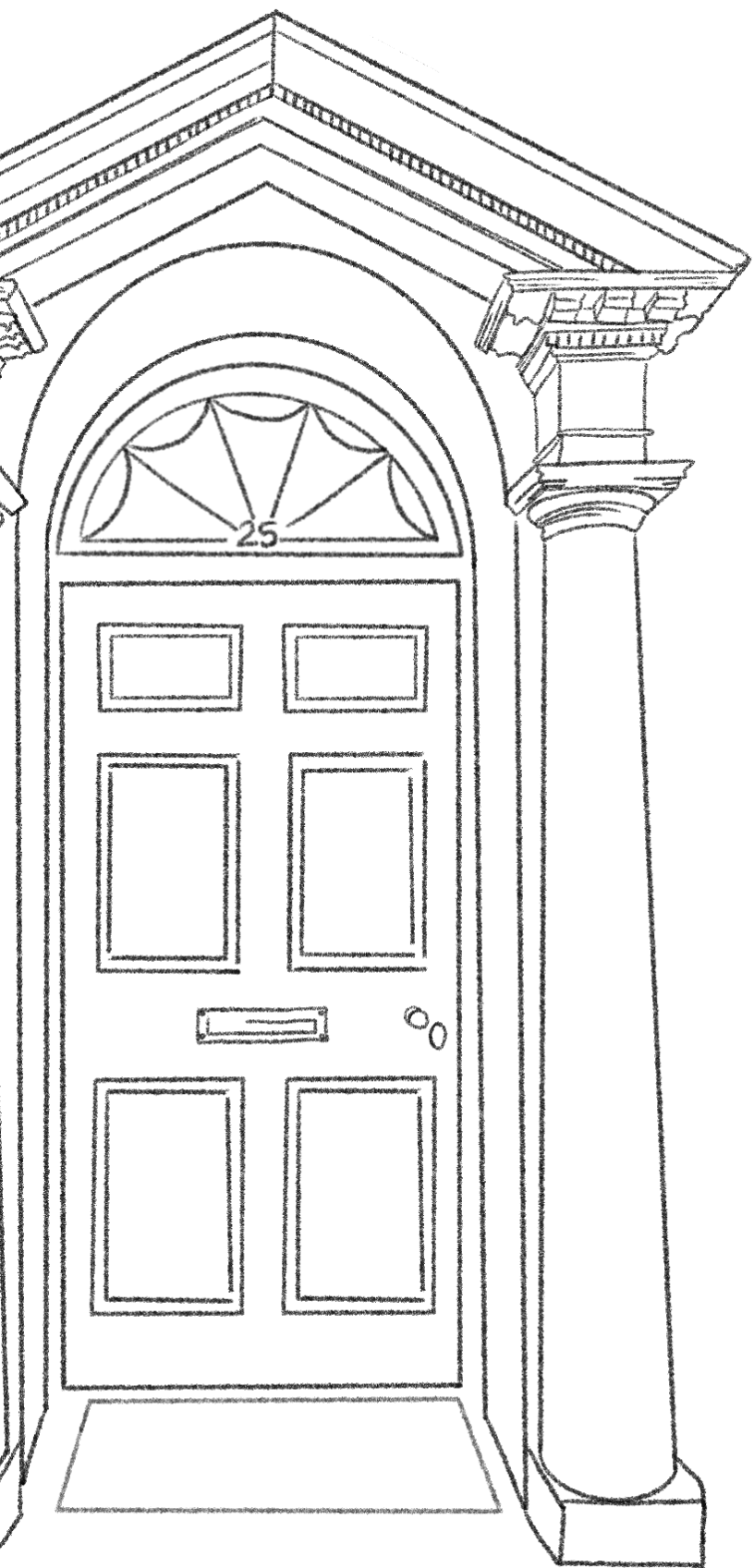
when I shatter my reflection  
(You are there!)

*the night is bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light with you.*

Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!

I want to see me through your eyes.





# No Place Like Home

JASON YU

Where is home for you? Maybe it's your hometown. You feel most at home when enjoying a meal at the dinner table or being addressed by a name that only your family knows, or perhaps when you're surrounded by close friends from high school. Maybe it's Charlottesville. Your closest friend might be your roommate, or perhaps you feel most at home during an impromptu gathering with friends or during a walk in Charlottesville's evening air. Maybe home is a place that you lived for a little while growing up but have since moved away from, the place in which your fondest memories were made. Whatever the case, I suspect that home, wherever that may be, is not so much tied to the location itself as much as it is the people who live there. As Elvis puts it, "Home is where the heart is, and my heart is anywhere you are."<sup>1</sup>

The fact that "home" is tied to friends and community means that moving away from home is often a lonely experience. Indeed, first-year students may find it difficult to adjust to a brand new environment, missing their friends and family. Fourth-year students may be wrestling with where to live after graduation, recognizing that even moving back to one's hometown after graduation can feel like an oddly isolating experience, especially if once-close friends and siblings are no longer around. Despite the loneliness of moving, young adults are more mobile today than they have been in the nearly 60 years for which data are available.<sup>2</sup>

This increased mobility, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the emerging loneliness epidemic in the US. One Harvard study suggests that 36% of all Americans—including 61% of young adults—feel "serious loneliness."<sup>3</sup> The BBC Loneliness Experiment, a large-scale global study, recently published results revealing that loneliness is most prevalent among young people in individualistic societies, suggesting that American college students and recent graduates are at high risk. Loneliness—much like hunger or thirst—is a signal that we're lacking something.<sup>4</sup> Research has linked social isolation to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: heart disease, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, and even death.<sup>5</sup> Loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.<sup>6,7</sup> The fact that physical wellbeing is tied to relational fulfillment implies that humans are hardwired to be together. But even though we are more connected than ever before, an unprecedented number of us struggle with loneliness. So how do we combat this epidemic in our society?

Put simply, modern loneliness is difficult to overcome because it is rooted in a deep-seated lie embedded in the fabric of Western culture. It's the lie that says that you are the center of the universe, that you should pursue individual fulfillment through career, wealth, and status even if it means neglecting your need for deep relationships. It leads us to ask "What's in it for me?" when approaching relationships, making them shallow and transactional. Even when we attempt to establish deeper friendships, the motivation is often selfish. For example, observe the subtly self-serving rhetoric in the advice offered by the popular science YouTube channel Kurzgesagt: "In general, our favorite topic is ourselves and the things we care about because we are literally at the center of our own universe. People tend to like people who are genuinely interested in them, so if you want to make friends, your goal should be trying to learn what makes them tick."<sup>8</sup> We all understand that this conventional wisdom has elements of truth in it; friendship requires time, effort, and authenticity. But loneliness is still on the rise, likely because we are approaching friendship with ourselves at the center. In a world full of transactional relationships, the Bible

offers a fresh perspective on the value of close friendship and community. Notice the selflessness of the early church as described in Acts 2, which offers a compelling picture of biblical fellowship: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."<sup>9</sup> For the early church, involvement with this close-knit community was more than mere happenstance; it was a selflessly intentional commitment to fellowship.

*In a world full of transactional relationships, the Bible offers a fresh perspective on the value of close friendship and community.*

In fact, the author of Hebrews exhorts readers to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another."<sup>10</sup> One instance in which the Bible displays the wonder and power of intentional friendship through Ruth, who loyally clung to her mother-in-law Naomi, saying, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."<sup>11</sup> Jesus himself invested deeply in friendships, both with his disciples and with others such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, ultimately showing his sacrificial love by living out his teaching that "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."<sup>12</sup> Observe the fervent language that the apostle Paul uses when writing to various churches: "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,"<sup>13</sup> "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."<sup>14</sup>

Even with his many missionary travels, Paul found friendship and community in the various churches he planted and strengthened. And yet Paul also introduces





**Noelle Lee**  
*Nahea, 2022*  
Intaglio printmaking

a broader, seemingly contradictory perspective, reminding followers of Christ that their “citizenship is in heaven.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the author of Hebrews, after encouraging believers to “not give up meeting together,”<sup>10</sup> subsequently writes that “this world is not our home; we are looking forward to our everlasting home in heaven.”<sup>16</sup> We’re left with a paradox. On one hand, we see a call to be fully present in the here-and-now, deeply investing in friendships and binding ourselves together in community. But we are also in an apparent tension with this eternal perspective in which we acknowledge that this world is not our home and that everything on earth will pass away. So which is it? Should our home be on earth, or should our home be in heaven? Curiously, Paul and the author of Hebrews don’t seem to view these two perspectives as incompatible.

On one hand, there’s a temptation to not invest in friendships at all on account of their ephemerality. Friendships rarely last for life, and it’s exceedingly difficult to continue maintaining them after major transitions like moving to a different location or growing into a different life stage. I found this especially true during a summer internship in San Francisco. “Because I’m only here for 12 weeks,” I thought, “it’s not a big deal that I don’t make friends.” I was scared of investing time and effort into friendships only for it to amount to nothing after I moved back to Virginia. Another example of this mindset played out over Easter weekend of 2021. I went to northern Virginia to visit my family, and over the weekend, my family and I attended various gatherings with friends from our local church. Recognizing that I would probably only see these people this one time for the entire year (and quite possibly much longer than that), I succumbed to a defeatist mindset and had a poor attitude as a result, complaining that there wasn’t any point in trying to talk to people or encourage others if I was only going to see them once. Sensing my apathy, my mom called me out directly, noting that my attitude was rooted in a form of selfishness that said to the people around me, “You’re not worth my time.” As usual, Jesus sets the perfect example for Christians through his deep investment in friends despite his short, three-year ministry as well as the way in which Jesus never passed

up an opportunity to care for people around him, even those that he would likely never see again. Jesus’ life demonstrates that at all times, we have opportunities to show God’s love to others, whether in the sweet embrace of a years-long friendship or in the fleeting interactions with a restaurant server or grocery store cashier. Through his relational intentionality, Jesus invites us to consider viewing our current living situations and post-graduation destinations not as arbitrary locations tied to school or work but rather specific calls from the Holy Spirit to edify the people around us. He calls us to make our home right where we are.

On the other hand, there is a temptation to be so tied to our current homes that we potentially miss a bigger picture of God’s will for our lives. Friendships on earth are necessary and valuable, but they are imperfect and they will never fully satisfy us. One sign that we might be trying to find our satisfaction in friends is a rejection of the prospect of moving away from home, wherever that might be. This rejection might result from being overly comfortable in our current circumstances that we find ultimate security in other people, or perhaps it’s rooted in a fear that God will not provide for our relational needs. But if we are so hyper-focused on our temporary realities, holding so tightly to the present, then we’ll forget to look beyond for the broader picture of God’s plan in our lives.

*Friendships on earth are necessary and valuable, but they are imperfect and they will never fully satisfy us.*

Sometimes God calls us to leave our home behind to accomplish a greater purpose, as was the case for Paul and Barnabas: “While they [the church at Antioch] were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”<sup>17</sup> Cheerful obedience to such a calling is only possible when we keep an eternal perspective in mind, recognizing that we are working for a heavenly reward from God, who said that “everyone who has left houses



or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”<sup>18</sup> Christians must recognize that their true home is ultimately in heaven, and that they are playing a part in a much bigger story centered around Jesus, who said, “My kingdom is not of this world.”<sup>19</sup>

But there’s still a lingering question: Where is home? Is it on earth, or is it in heaven? Two passages that have helped bring me some measure of clarity are found in Jeremiah and Isaiah. God, speaking through Jeremiah to the Jews in captivity, away from their home in Judah, encourages them to “build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.”<sup>20</sup> In this passage, God instructs his people to settle down and make their home in exile before he brings them back to the promised land.

<sup>1</sup>Elvis Presley, “Home is Where the Heart Is,” track 8 on I Got Lucky, Sony Music Entertainment, 1971, Spotify streaming.  
<sup>2</sup>Mikhitarian, Sarah. “On the Move: Why Young Adults Today Are More Mobile Than Previous Generations,” Zillow, October 3, 2019. Accessed October 15, 2022. <https://www.zillow.com/research/young-adults-are-more-mobile-25592/>.  
<sup>3</sup>Cashin, Alison. “The global pandemic has deepened an epidemic of loneliness in America,” Harvard Graduate School of Education, February 2021. Accessed October 15, 2022. <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/loneliness-in-america>.  
<sup>4</sup>Beilock, Sian Leah. “Why Young Americans Are Lonely,” Scientific American, July 27, 2020. Accessed October 15, 2022. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-young-americans-are-lonely/>.  
<sup>5</sup>“Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks,” National Institute on Aging, April 23, 2019. Accessed October 15, 2022. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks>.  
<sup>6</sup>Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, Smith, Timothy B., Baker, Mark, Harris, Tyler, Stephenson, David. “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review,” Perspectives on Psychological Science 10, no. 10 (2015): 227-237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>.  
<sup>7</sup>“Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index,” Cigna, May 2018. Accessed October 15, 2022. [https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport\\_1524069371598-173525450.pdf](https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf).  
<sup>8</sup>Kurzgesagt. “Why You Are Lonely and How to Make Friends,” YouTube Video, 9:22. September 6, 2022. [https://youtu.be/I9hj\\_Rux9y0](https://youtu.be/I9hj_Rux9y0).  
<sup>9</sup>Acts 2:44-47, NIV.  
<sup>10</sup>Hebrews 10:24-25, ESV.  
<sup>11</sup>Ruth 1:16, NIV.  
<sup>12</sup>John 15:13, ESV.  
<sup>13</sup>1 Thessalonians 2:17, ESV.  
<sup>14</sup>Philippians 1:8, NIV.  
<sup>15</sup>Philippians 3:20, NIV.  
<sup>16</sup>Hebrews 13:14-16, TLB.  
<sup>17</sup>Acts 13:2-3, NIV.  
<sup>18</sup>Matthew 19:29, NIV.  
<sup>19</sup>John 18:36, ESV.  
<sup>20</sup>Jeremiah 29:5-7, NIV.  
<sup>21</sup>Isaiah 65:21-23, NIV.

Next, take a look at Isaiah 65, a prophecy to the people of God about the new heaven and new earth: “They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them.”<sup>21</sup> Notice the similarities! The language used to describe an eternal, heavenly dwelling is the same language used to describe our homes on earth. Taken together, these passages suggest that we look forward to our ultimate home in heaven, but until then, we should establish our home when we are “in exile,” away from our true home, as a reflection of our true home in heaven. God has given us friendship and community as pictures of a heavenly, eternal reality. In heaven, we will experience community in its fullest and purest form, and even the closest relationships on earth will not compare to the glory of our eternal ones. Where is home for you? In the end, my true home is heaven, but for now, I’ve made my home here on earth.





# Saul, Job, & the Question of Suffering

KATE HABERL

In mid-August, I moved to Charlottesville. A month later, I woke up to ringing ears, blurry vision, and a mouth full of blood.

While on the road to a retreat, the car I was in had been t-boned, right where I was sitting, and I was knocked unconscious. I suddenly had a brain injury, whiplash, and pulmonary contusions to contend with. Months of my life devolved into headaches, academic accommodations, and conversations with insurance companies. In an instant, my whole life changed.

As humans, who invariably fall short of the glory of God, pain is inevitable. The pain I’ve been dealing with is very literal, but more often than not, pain comes in subtler forms — grief, anger, sadness. We often experience pain as a consequence of our own actions; other suffering, however, is unmerited.

When laying in my hospital bed, a verse from Job came to mind — “the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”<sup>1</sup> Job’s life was changed irrevocably because of his relationship with the Lord.

Job was a holy man, who followed God all the days of his life. The devil came to God and said that Job only followed God because he was blessed, and that if Job suffered, he would forsake the Lord. To prove that Job’s faith was not conditional on his circumstances, God tells Satan to go ahead and torment Job. The devil kills all of Job’s livestock, servants, and children. He afflicts Job with boils on his skin. Job’s wife tells him to forsake

God, and his closest friends come to tell him that the suffering he is experiencing must be his fault, somehow, and that he should seek forgiveness.

At the beginning of his story, Job said, “I am owed nothing. Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will return.”<sup>2</sup> When all that Job had was actually taken away, he struggled at length with why God had allowed this suffering to befall him and questioned why God lets good people suffer while bad people prosper.

I asked those questions too. The fact that I was in a car accident while driving from a church to a church retreat seemed incredibly unfair and ironic to me. I had been praying about the retreat we were heading to less than an hour before we got t-boned. Like Job, I felt angry. I had done nothing to cause or merit the suffering that I was experiencing.

If, in the Bible, Job is an example of what it looks like to experience undeserved suffering, Saul is the poster child for earning suffering. Saul was a Jewish Pharisee who took great pleasure in persecuting and killing Christians. Murder is a heinous crime, universally recognized as immoral and wrong — what action, more than murder, could cause one to merit suffering?

While traveling to Damascus, Saul suddenly heard a voice and fell to the ground. The voice was Jesus, saying to him “Saul, why do you persecute me...I am Jesus, who you are persecuting.”<sup>3</sup> I imagine him feeling a mixture of shock, awe, and pain. I imagine that those

feelings only intensified when he opened his eyes, only to see...nothing. He was blind. Saul went from a hotshot pharisee to a man splayed on the ground, prostrating in front of a God he had refused to accept. In that moment, Saul saw that instead of a righteous man, he was a sinner who had brought others deep suffering while accomplishing nothing.

At different times in our lives, we have all been Job, and we have all been Saul. As I heal from my car accident, I feel rather like Job — a victim of circumstances, crying out to God — “I was doing the right thing.” When I think of the unkind words I have spoken, and mistakes I have made, I think “Lord, I did so many things wrong. I deserve to suffer.”

Saul and Job are two sides of the same coin; we will all inflict pain, and have pain inflicted upon us, merited and unmerited, sinless and sinful. No matter the circumstances, we are suffering. We cannot avoid suffering, even if we do nothing to cause it. Our only choice is in how we respond to the pain we experience.

Acts 9 says that for three days after he was blinded, Saul did not eat or drink anything. Saul was a stubborn man. Beliefs long-held and fought for are not easily relinquished, so I picture Saul wrestling with the idea that not only had he not been serving the God that he claimed so deeply and zealously to love, but he had been hurting him with each and every persecution. Saul had to deal with the fact that he was not only



Noelle Lee  
*Wood intricacies*, 2019  
Pen & ink on paper





physically blind, but been blind in all ways. He had to grieve. He had to decide to choose Jesus, and the plan that he had for him.

Job’s family died — they were not coming back. Blindness, as far as Saul knew, was a permanent condition. They both could have lived with those things. It would have been hard, but they did not have to choose God. Similarly, my concussion will heal whether I invite God into that journey or not.

*Saul and Job are two sides of the same coin; we will all inflict pain, and have pain inflicted upon us, merited and unmerited, sinless and sinful.*

Both Saul and Job chose to press into the Lord, who waits for us in the midst of our pain. When Saul fell to the ground, Jesus spoke to him affectionately. When Paul (Saul) tells the story of this encounter with Jesus later, he says that Jesus said “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”<sup>4</sup> While Saul was still causing others great pain, indeed, causing them to die, Jesus was concerned with his suffering. Jesus also tells Saul that he has a plan for him, and he is going to use him. “I will rescue you,” Jesus says. God had a plan for Saul’s healing. He had a plan to restore all that Job had lost. Neither Job nor Saul knew about those plans, and they did not have to follow God.

Job saw the value of trusting God in suffering. He said, “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”<sup>5</sup> What Job understood is that whether his suffering had an earthly end or not, it would end in heaven. Some of the pain we experience has an end,

and some does not. Some things we break are fixable, and others are not. Even at the end of Job’s story, when God rewards his faithfulness, he does not get all that he originally lost back — he had more children, but still had to deal with the loss of his first seven sons and three daughters.

Pain and grief are intertwined. Where one leads, the other follows. Personally, I am processing the loss that comes with my injuries, specifically a serious concussion. The plans I had — to attend football games, get coffee with friends, go on road trips over fall break, and even simply attend classes, walk around, and shower, are gone — at least for a few weeks. This is a grief that stems from loss. There is a particular grief in knowing that your suffering is self-inflicted. Though I claim no part in these current injuries, I have, many times been the architect of my own demise, much like Saul.

To turn to God when we are responsible for sin and suffering is to learn that we are wholly unworthy of the grace of God but that Jesus loves us anyway. Jesus will repair what we have broken. It is to see that we are not too far gone to be used by God.

To press into God when our suffering is not our fault, after the loss of a loved one, or an affliction, or a car accident on the way to a retreat is different. Instead, we say: God, I trust you. Your ways are higher than my ways, and though I hurt through no fault of my own, I choose you, as you chose me when I caused you pain.

Turning to God does not take that grief away. However, when we press into Jesus’ presence, whether in repentance (Saul) or worship (Job), he walks through that journey with us, and it is better than if we walked that journey alone.

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<sup>1</sup>Job 1:2, NIV.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid.  
<sup>3</sup>Acts 9:4-5, NIV.  
<sup>4</sup>Acts 26:14, NIV.  
<sup>5</sup>Job 42:2, NIV.



# The Balance Between Exile & Slave

TYLER HELLSTERN

Some of us are painfully aware of the online masquerade we play and the addictive, habit-inducing, treacherously useful devices we all carry in our pockets. Social media and our phones break our focus, reduce our attention spans, and distract us from the things we love. Many of us employ all manners of protection methods to halt the epidemic of social media addiction in fear that its addictive clutches will bar us from becoming who we want to become. When we lose control of our habits and our actions, we lose control of the ability to shape our identity. Social media threatens to dominate our habits, thereby dominating our identity.

I sometimes pride myself on the fact that I have never used a social media account. I have set up the ultimate defense against the epidemic. I use the most effective mask, have the most recent vaccines, and follow the strictest quarantine regimen. Yet the infection has still crept in. My mind urges me to check my phone, even now while writing. Because of a lack of social media apps, I turn to any other app my phone has to offer: Google Photos, the Weather App, my calendar,

and even the settings app. My aimless scroll finds itself scrounging these depths and leaves me staring blankly at the pollen count and fire danger meters at the bottom of the Weather App. I habitually flick from home screen to home screen in a meaningless search as my brain scrambles for tidbits of information like a starving rodent fighting for a stale pizza crust. Despite the apparent sacrifices I have made, I still seem to have lost against the prevailing culture which seeks to make me a distracted and impulsive stimulus seeker.

But I have not completely lost control of my identity. No one really has. The variety of rich personalities within any given population is a testament to the level of autonomy we retain as individuals. However, while social media culture has not wrested all control of identity from the individual, it still maintains a tight grip. But what if it had no grip? What if I were to successfully seize total control of my personal identity from mainstream culture? Such independence from culture might also mean being ostracized from culture. If I were to take the next step and get rid of my phone, not only would I miss out on texting, calling, Google

maps, and Spotify, I would find myself completely aloof from the population: lonely, unrelatable, and excluded. Such a quarantine protects me from infection, but at what cost? There are times when it is already more difficult to relate to peers who have social media because I miss out on pop culture references and sports updates, not to mention it is harder to keep in touch with old friends.



PHOTOGRAPHY FROM ASHLEY FAN

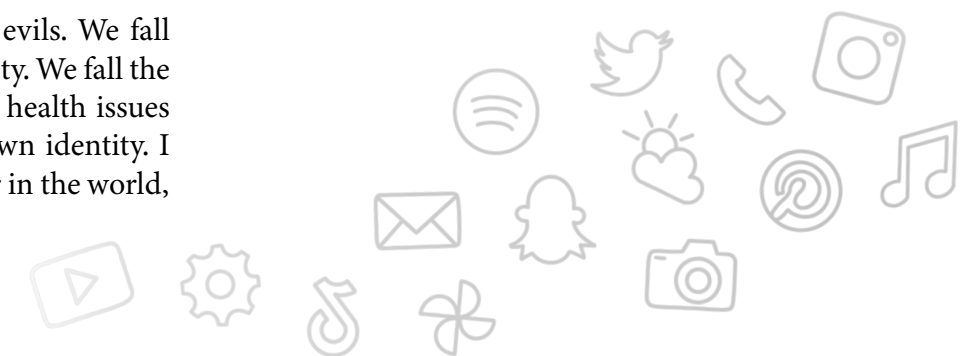
What about all the negative effects the social media infection has on its hosts? According to Experian consumer research from 2020, 98% of college-age students use social media.<sup>1</sup> Another study found the “Negative effects [of social media] included anxiety, depression, loneliness, poor sleep quality, poor mental health indicators, thoughts of self-harm and suicide, increased levels of psychological distress, cyber bullying, body image dissatisfaction, fear of missing out and decreased life satisfaction.”<sup>2</sup> This plethora of negative effects might hinder me from pursuing the things I want to pursue and becoming the person I want to become.

So here we are: balancing between two evils. We fall one way and become alienated from society. We fall the other way and battle a myriad of mental health issues which restrict our ability to shape our own identity. I want to hope that I can live as a sojourner in the world,

and not a permanent resident. I want to hope that I can have the antidote to the infection in hand while standing amid disease. In my own life, I have been tempted to give up my struggle against social media out of a sense of despair that the balance cannot be found. But despite the addictive habits I hold because of my phone, I still have hope that this balance is possible. The crux of the issue is identity. I can struggle with the negative consequences of phone and social media overuse but still hold on to my identity and make it what I choose. It means taking some stance that separates me to a degree from mainstream culture. For me, that is a total rejection of social media use. Even though the stand does not squash my phone addiction, it helps me keep an internal balance between the extremes. Even if I tip to one side or the other, I maintain an anchor in the knowledge that I am an individual. I am always free to live individually, and the decision to not use social media proves that to myself.

An identity anchor does not need to be a rejection of social media. It could be any varying degree of phone usage boundary, a unique fashion choice, or an unusual daily habit. I do not claim that an identity anchor will stabilize our tendencies toward cultural exiles or prisoners, but I do believe that it can help us find our identity in someone that does.

<sup>1</sup> Jason Dossett, “Is Social Media Damaging or Helping College Students?” Papyrus, October 27th, 2020, <https://papyrus.greenville.edu/2020/10/is-social-media-damaging-or-helping-college-students/> See also, How Social Media Analysis Can Benefit Students, axiomhired.com, retrieved June 16, 2022, from <https://www.axiomhired.com/posts/how-social-media-analysis-can-benefit-students>.  
<sup>2</sup> Hassan Ebrahimpour Sadagheyan, Farin Tatari, “Investigating the role of social media on mental health”, October 16th, 2020, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/MHSI-06-2020-0039/full/html>.





# Dawn Again

SAM KIPPS

O the Dawn again, day after day,  
Sun's raised after the dark of the night  
Without much to say  
But to signal the renewed fight.

So it continues to lift and rise,  
Bright and bold, never one to meet its eyes.  
When it begins to swelter overhead,  
The wanderers sweat—trying to bring to life what seems dead.

They toil, talk, and work  
Through thistle and weeds—  
But O, how futility does lurk,  
And the ground begrudgingly concedes.

From their labor though  
Does a sprout erupt forth,  
But by now gold has just begun to show,  
And soon a radiant star will show north.

Now, the setting sun: resplendent, fiery sphere,  
Swiftly following, the dawn of dark night will soon appear.  
Then forgotten, will the trials, joys, and troubles of the day be,  
For as swiftly as night's dawn came upon them, tomorrow's they'll see.



PHOTOGRAPHY FROM JACK MILLER



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